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*"Given what a developer is — a conductor of sorts — I can't think of any better training than the law."*

— Carl J. Montante

## Alumni Develop Successful Careers

**T**hey are among the top builders and developers in Western New York, their imprint clearly stamped on the region's landscape, from the high-tech corridor in downtown Buffalo to sparkling tracts of homes and offices in the suburbs. Willard A. Genrich Sr. '38, Bernard I. Obletz '48, Carl J. Montante '67 and Arthur M. Gellman '69 have made their marks outside the practice of law, but not without its influence. Each has built a successful career in construction and development upon a concrete foundation of legal knowledge acquired at UB Law School.

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**A** developer on the front lines of Buffalo's economic renaissance, Carl J. Montante says he practiced law only "for about a week," but nevertheless found law school a crucial part of his preparation for success.

"Not only was it invaluable to be trained in thinking quickly on your feet, but it was even more effective for me to be able to apply the Socratic methodology — especially when negotiating with a client or lender."

He learned his lessons well, and the evidence abounds in Western New York. Uniland Development Co., of which Montante is president, is one of the area's largest development firms. It has a real estate portfolio of nearly 4.5 million square feet and an occupancy rate of 97 percent.

The company has transformed large and often abandoned tracts of property into new landmarks in Buffalo and its suburbs, including the Town of Tonawanda and Amherst. The cornerstone of Uniland's extensive projects is now complete — the \$40 million University Cor-

porate Centre in Amherst, Uniland's new headquarters.

From shortly after Montante and his brother Tom joined to operate Unibrand Tire and Product Co. in the late 1960s until now, headquarters has been in the Tonawanda Industrial Center in the City of Tonawanda. The site of a former landfill and warehouse, it has given way to a complex of 16 commercial buildings. And Uniland, the development firm Montante formed in 1974, has given birth to a chain of projects in the area.

Among Montante's most visible projects are those in the heart of Buffalo. The once-blighted Elm-Oak corridor has been transformed into the spine for high-tech offices and companies in Buffalo's Technology Campus. Northward along Main Street, the old Sears, Roebuck & Co. complex at Delavan Avenue is now a complex of new offices surrounded by urban greenery.

Uniland's distinctive emphasis on green spaces and trees and a campus-like setting is more obvious in the city, but it also marks the company's suburban projects, including part of the Audubon New Community, the 20-acre Sheridan Meadows Corporate Park, and the 32-acre University Corporate Centre on Maple Road.

Montante says of his background: "Given what a developer is — a conductor of sorts — I can't think of any better training than the law. You're required to deal with so many different parties, often at once — with lenders and clients and planners and public officials — and you have to know how to negotiate with each, to learn the limits of where you can take a project. I think legal training is well suited for such a process."

It's been apparent that he has been a



*Carl J. Montante, Class of 1967*

maestro in his field. But just as impressive is Montante's commitment to the community's quality of life. Over the years, he has assumed major leadership roles for various community agencies and philanthropies. He is chairman of Sisters Hospital Foundation and a member of the hospital's board. He is also a trustee of Canisius High School and Canisius College, and a member of the Title Guarantee Co. and Key Bank of Western New York boards. In 1988, he was chairman of the Catholic Charities campaign.

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**B**ernard I. Oblatz is a developer who believes in "doing more." Oblatz is president of First Amherst Development Group and has specialized in office and retail

development in Amherst. "Amherst and Snyder have been a growth area of the community, but we have always operated here on a personal basis," Oblatz says of his company's projects. "We know the people. We know the community, and we're proud of that."

That pride shows in First Amherst's projects. They are upscale and attractive, and place a premium on being compatible with the surrounding environment.

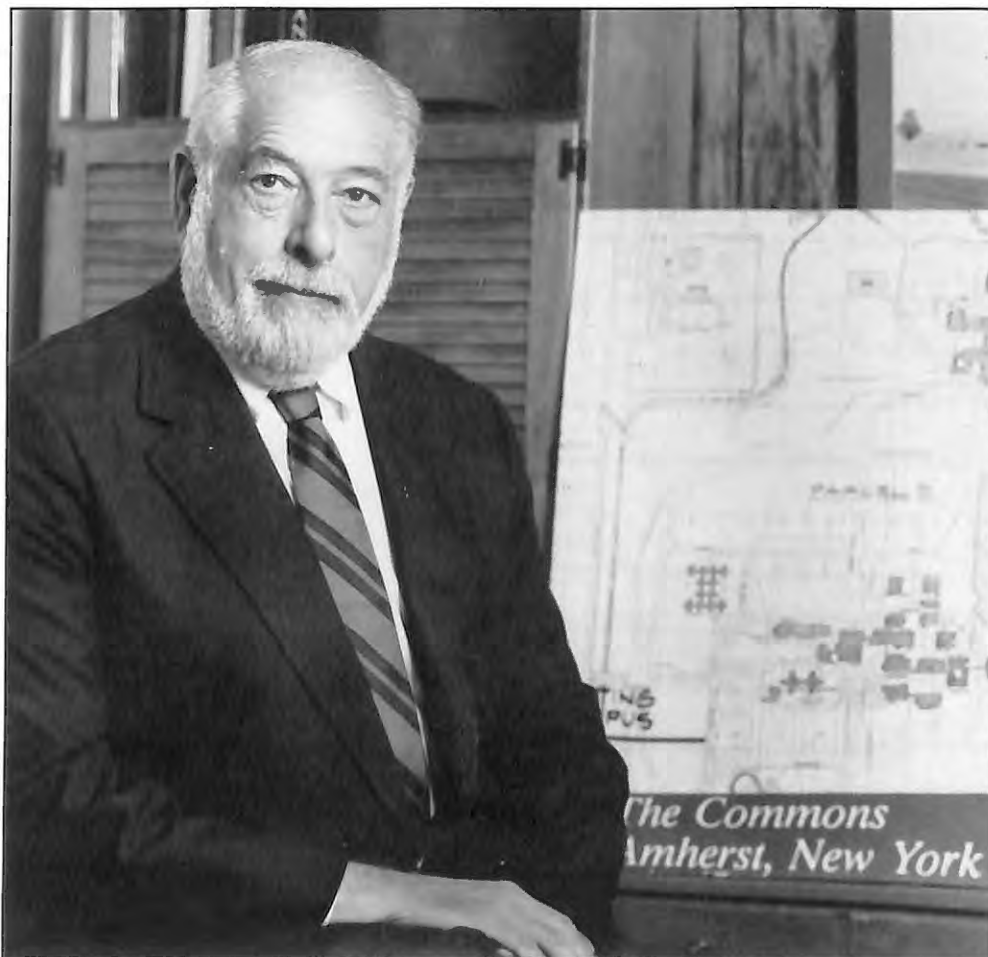
The company, with Oblatz's son Stephen as vice president, now owns and operates 37 buildings covering more than 1 million square feet.

"This has been a growing community, and we don't believe in development by building a bunch of vanilla boxes in the middle of a field," Oblatz says of his development philosophy.

Among the flagship projects undertaken by First Amherst have been the conversion and expansion of the Center of Williamsville office building (the first multistory office building in Williamsville); Snyder Square, an elegant 11-store shopping mall; Snyder Square II, a companion mall in the Harlem Road-Main Street area; and office complexes that include a six-story structure on Harlem Road near Sheridan Drive in Williamsville.

The firm, Oblatz explains, aims to develop principally office space and specialty retailing space. "We are strictly a private enterprise and don't rely on government subsidies," he says.

Last year, the University at Buffalo Foundation selected First Amherst to build a \$6 million retail complex — to be called The Commons — on the Univer-



*Bernard I. Oblatz, Class of 1948*

sity's North Campus. Covering 40,000 square feet, the mall will include shops, restaurants, convenience stores, services and recreation center. Ten thousand feet in a second story will provide office space for auxiliary student services. Student entrepreneurs will be allowed to lease kiosks, cart locations and small retail spaces.

"The philosophy is to get as many local merchants involved as possible," Oblatz says.

Oblatz is convinced that Amherst's expansion is going to continue. "This is a growth community, and I think it will continue that way," he says.

To those in law school who may be thinking of a future in development, Oblatz points to the truth of an old adage: The lawyer who represents himself has a

fool for a client. "From personal experience as a developer, I can tell you this much about the business: Better take a lawyer with you everywhere you go."

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"I believe the pride I have in my education is shared by hundreds and thousands of other graduates. This is a great university and a great law school—one of the greatest in the country," says Willard A. Genrich Sr. If anyone has the expertise to make such value judgments, Genrich does. As a member and former chancellor of the New York State Board of Regents, he has exerted great influence on the course of public schooling in the state. As a member of the SUNY Board of Trustees, he guided development of

the state university system through periods of rapid expansion.

Today, he takes pride in knowing that the University is viewed by many as the new economic and philosophical center of Western New York.

In private business, Genrich is the president of Genrich Builders Inc. The firm has taken on a number of commercial projects—including the Lord Amherst Motor Hotel, the new Amherst Post Office, the Best Western Regency Hotel in Hamburg, and farther afield, the Olger Danske Hotel on St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. But Genrich Builders is noted foremost for its work in residential construction, mainly in the Amherst/Snyder area, including the Smallwood/Lakewood/Livingston area and the lovely Hedstrom Estates development.



*Willard A. Genrich Sr., Class of 1938*

While managing this wide range of development and construction, Genrich has put equal effort into public life. From 1962 to 1973, he was the unsalaried director of the New York State Higher Education Assistance Corp. As a board member of the state's Higher Education Opportunity Program, he helped to establish the Guaranteed Student Loan program—a program so successful that it was picked up by the federal government and has helped countless thousands of students meet their college costs.

In his two terms as chancellor of the Board of Regents (from 1980 to 1985), he was a major force in writing the dynamic 1984 Regents Action Plan. It's that plan which is serving as the foundation blueprint for bolstering New York State's public education curriculum.

Genrich worked his way through UB as a beekeeper—he owned 100 hives and had shares in another 100, and sold honey door-to-door and on consignment through small grocery stores. It's an interest he continues to this day—he maintains three colonies of honeybees in the back yard of his son, Willard A. Genrich Jr., also a developer.

Genrich Sr. was graduated from UB Law School in 1978 and was admitted to the bar a year later. After serving as a special agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, he turned to a career in the construction business. That was shortly after World War II.

It's a measure of Genrich's energy that when he left the position of chancellor in 1985 (while remaining on the Board of Regents), he had just started to consider

scaling back a work schedule that covered seven days and 60 to 70 hours a week.

Legal training, Genrich says, is "outstanding preparation for many fields. It helps you develop a way of thinking—a discipline that I have found to be a valuable asset. There is no question that my legal education and the skills I acquired in law school were important to my work as a real estate developer."

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**A**rthur M. Gellman is co-chairman of the Benchmark Group, a development company based in Amherst that specializes in shopping centers, offices and multi-family housing—but "primarily shopping centers," according to Gellman. One of three partners, he works with his



*Arthur M. Gellman, Class of 1969*

brother George Gellman and Clarke Narins.

Right now, their primary areas of development are located throughout New York State, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Minnesota. Most of their office buildings are located in the Buffalo area, while their housing projects are spread throughout the Northeastern United States.

Benchmark Group's most recent major projects in Buffalo are the renovation of the downtown Sibley's building, now called the Lafayette Court building, and the renovation of what was the old Sibley's building at Main and Eggert, now leased to Goldome Bank. They have also developed a number of shopping centers in the area.

Describing his company, Gellman says,

"We endeavor to develop very high quality real estate, to do everything possible to accommodate our tenants—and also to build an organization with people who truly enjoy participating in our overall development activity."

Gellman is also an officer of Conbow Corp., a recreational company that specializes in bowling.

While at UB, Gellman was a member of Law Review. After he graduated, he practiced for only a short time, but he says, "I think law has proved to be a valuable background... a real asset that I use on a daily basis."

A leader in the Jewish community, locally and nationally, Gellman says, "I'm thankful that I'm in a business that gives me a little time, so that I can devote some of my energies to things outside of

business that I think are very important."

He is currently the chairman of the United Jewish Fund campaign of the Jewish Federation of Greater Buffalo Inc. He also serves on the national board of HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society). He is the immediate past president of the B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation of Buffalo and serves on the board of Chabad House. He lives in East Amherst with his wife, Susan, and four children. ■